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46

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The Portsmouth Beneficial School 1755–1939

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Cover:
'High Spirits' – boys at play, Eighteenth Century

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THE PORTSMOUTH BENEFICIAL SCHOOL 1755–1939

Laurence V Gatt, MEd

Introduction

Many people still refer to Portsmouth's famous Charity School as 'Old Benny'. They think of it with affection. It was there the children of the poor of Portsea were taught for nearly 200 years, and where the Beneficial Society who founded the school brought a touch of colour into their drab existence. The building remains in Kent Street, Portsea, or Old Rope Walk as it was called in the 18th century. A stone on the gable carries the legend: 'This building was erected in 1784 by the Beneficial Society for their Free School for boys established 1755.' It is two storeyed. The ground floor was designed as a large classroom, the upper floor as the headquarters and meeting room of the Society. It stands in red brick, Georgian style, no longer the focal point of the Portsea community, though still used for education as a youth training centre. But as an educational foundation it is possibly unique.

To understand the character of this school we must go into an 18th century public house, the 'Shakespear Head', on the night of the 9 December 1754. There, eight men had gathered: a merchant, John Shakespear, the owner of the premises; Robert Temple, a brewer, Mathew Arnold, grocer, William Hinton, ironmonger, Robert Williams, apothecary, Thomas Eyer, carpenter, Robert Reeks, draper and William Cox, butcher. They had before them the draft of an agreement, under the title 'Rules and Articles', and their intention was to set themselves up as a mutual aid society. They would never have used the expression as it belonged to a later period, but they gave themselves the name 'Beneficial Society', and, though they did not know it, they were a forerunner in a field of many others up and down the country.

The 'Rules and Articles', of which there were twenty, set out the pattern the society was to take. Briefly, a committee of four stewards were to be responsible for collecting monthly shilling payments from members, keeping the money safely in a chest with five locks, and paying out sick, funeral and widow benefits. But Article 19 went beyond the self interest of members. It read

> That in case at any time the Money in Stock of this Society shall appear to the Majority of the Members to be more than sufficient for carrying on the friendly intention of Supporting Each other in Affliction, that then such a part of the said Stock as the Said Majority shall determine may be applied to the putting out poor Children to school which shall be chosen by ticket.[1]

'Poor children.' They were to be boys from poor families in Portsmouth Common, an over-spill area outside the old ramparts, now, since 1792, called Portsea. And Portsmouth Common, as well as Portsmouth itself, was indeed poor. Rapid growth areas are often beset with physical as well as social problems, and moral ones too. General Wolfe, passing through Portsmouth on his way to Quebec in 1758, wrote to his mother

> The necessity of living in the midst of the diabolical citizens of Portsmouth is a real and unavoidable calamity. It is a doubt to me if there is such another collection of demons upon the whole earth. Vice, however, wears so ugly a garb that it disgusts rather than tempts.[2]

There was another view of Portsea, hopefully, nearer the truth: Lake Taswell described it as 'a very popular genteel town, exceeding Portsmouth in the number of its inhabitants and edifices'.[3] It had its fashionable areas where many local families of wealth and substance had their homes.

It was, however, to the poor and needy of Portsea that the Beneficial Society turned in benevolence. The caring role of the Medieval Church had not yet been fully assumed by the more secular society which replaced it, and it was left to individuals with a sense of compassion and responsibility to fill the vacuum. The Tudor Crown had failed to use the wealth that came into its hands as a result of the dissolution of the monasteries and the destruction of the old Church, for the lasting benefit of society: for education, or for the poor and needy. It is to the credit of the Beneficial Society that they assumed the mantle of compassion to offer some of the poorer children of Portsea the benefits of free schooling.

Charity boys taught privately 1755–84

To begin with, they selected six boys on a ticket basis. Each member of the Society was entitled to a ticket, and the lucky six in the draw won the privilege of nominating a boy for schooling. The school chosen was that run privately by Charles Bettesworth who had been teaching under licence for eleven years. He accepted these Charity Boys

into his private classroom, and taught them reading, writing and arithmetic. He found it profitable. An entry, dated 1757, in the Beneficial Society's minute book reads: 'Paid Mr Bettesworth for Educating the Charity Boys as this his Rec. £6.7*s*.1*d*.'.[4] It was a quarterly payment for teaching six boys, a welcome addition to his normal income. Yet he allowed himself to fall in arrears in paying his monthly shilling as a member of the Society and was eventually excluded.

Practising as a schoolmaster at the same time was James Cox, who lived and taught in Bishop Street, Portsea. From the records of St George's Chapel nearby,[5] we find him to be the father of William Cox who eventually inherited house and school and taught the Charity boys for forty years.

The young schoolmaster became a member of the Beneficial Society in 1757 and almost immediately became its secretary and treasurer. His neat hand and ability with figures recommended him and the researcher of today is greatly indebted to him for the ease with which the records of the Society of his day can be read. He took on the six Charity boys who had been with Charles Bettesworth together with another six and three years later there were eighteen. In 1780 a Mr Edward Craft left money

> . . . for the schooling of as many poor boys as the said Interest will allow to read, write and Arithmetick to fit them for Trades and my Will is that these Boys be first chosen from poor Widows children And if not enough of them then to be filled up with poor Artificers Children all to be of the Parish of Portsea . . ..[6]

The interest was sufficient to cover the cost of twenty more boys, and their schooling too was entrusted to William Cox. It should be noted that the source of these scholarships was through St George's Chapel, not direct from the Beneficial Society which had its own standing arrangement with Cox, and this must be seen as a tribute to William Cox as a schoolmaster. At the time, in that small area of Portsea, there were other competing schools. The Rate Book reveals that John Catermole of Cross Street, 1785, James McDonald of Queen Street, 1787, Richard Wade of Bishop Street, 1786, Charles Tabor of Bishop Street, 1787, Thomas Atkins, 1785, and Richard Bailey, 1786, both of Old Rope Walk, all ran schools.[7]

'. . . for the schooling . . . to read, write and Arithmetick to fit them for Trades'. The Beneficial School, Portsea
Courtesy of B Lionel

'. . . directing their steps in the unerring path . . .'. Children, 1908
Courtesy of Miss G Johnson

The Charity School 1784–1826

William Cox relinquished control of the private school he inherited from his father, James Cox, in his Bishop Street home, in favour of Richard Wade, a schoolmaster who ran a smaller school nearby, and assumed responsibility for the new premises. There, between 1784 and 1797, when Cox died, around 300 Charity boys enjoyed the benefits of his devotedness and firm discipline, learning to read, write and calculate, and to appreciate the Christian way of life.

The honorary members of the Society had become the natural governing body of the school and the responsibility of finding a successor to William Cox, when he died in 1797, fell on them. An entry in the minute book tells us that 'Mr Paine was temporary master for 6 weeks on the death of Mr Cox'[14] and that a committee of twenty-two Gentlemen 'were delegated to make a Report to the Society to take into consideration the appointment of a schoolmaster, in the room of the late William Cox'. Three prominent names appear in the list: Sir John Carter, John Godwin and Stephen Gaselee. They resolved that 'a week's notice be given to all the members previous to the time of electing the Schoolmaster; that the names of the Candidates be inserted at the bottom of the Notice', and that an advertisement be placed with the *Salisbury Journal*, the *Portsmouth Gazette,* and *The Star*, twice in each paper.[15] Whereas William Cox had been paid between £4 and £5 a quarter, the new head would 'be paid after the Rate of one Guinea per annum for each boy's education, including books, stationery etc. etc'. This arrangement was over generous. It overlooked the consequences of a large increase in numbers and was to lead to trouble. Later, cuts had to be made to trim the salary to an acceptable level. In fact, during the depression which followed the war with Napoleon, the Society resolved 'that the number of boys to be educated by the Society be reduced from 80 to 40 with a proportional reduction of the Schoolmaster's Salary'.[16]

The choice of William Cox's successor eventually fell on Joseph Scullard. He received 91 votes from a general meeting of the Society as against ten received by William Courtney and five by Simon Clement, the two competing candidates. During his period in charge of the school an attempt was made to provide the Charity Boys with clothes as well as education

No doubt the addition of twenty boys to a private house school caused problems. Mr Cox's commitment from his agreement with the Minister and Commissioners of St George's, was to provide

> for the education of twenty boys as described in the said Will (that of Edward Craft) for the sum of twenty five pounds per annum, in Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, to fit them for trades. He the said William Cox, engaging to find them in Books and Necessary articles for that purpose.[8]

Nevertheless William Cox did not confine his obligations to teaching reading, writing and arithmetic. He seems to have been willing to include some elementary classical teaching, as was not uncommon at the time in schools that had any pretentions. Taking exception to this, when Cox's successor was selected in 1796, the society 'resolved that in the opinion of the Committee the classics should not be taught in the school either by the Master or Usher'.[9] But as a Christian he included religious instruction and encouraged church attendance. The minute books refer to 'Mr William Cox conducted 30 Charity Boys to the Consecration of St John's Chapel'[10] and to '30 Charity boys walked to and from St George's Chapel in their White Surplices with bibles in their hands'.[11] These surplices served as a school uniform for special occasions, even non-ecclesiastical; the boys wore them for their annual dinner party and later on outings to Leigh Park. In his book *By Celia's Arbour,* Sir Walter Besant recalls the square pews in St George's Chapel, which children found 'convenient for making faces at each other . . . round the altar rails sat a school of charity children who pinched each other during the service . . .' surplices and bibles notwithstanding.[12]

How William Cox coped with so many Charity Boys besides his normal pupils is a matter for conjecture. The solution, however, was found by the Beneficial Society, in whose deliberations Cox, as secretary, had influence. They decided to build their own headquarters and school.

A site was acquired in Old Rope Walk, now Kent Street, '. . . a piece of land from East to West thirty one feet eleven inches and in depth or length from North to South . . . seventy feet, for a Consideration of £280'.[13]

The impressive red brick building erected there served a dual purpose. The School, then consisting only of the Charity boys elected by the Beneficial Society, used the ground floor, a large open hall, while the members of the Society held their meetings on the upper floor. Eventually both rooms, and even the porchway were used as classroom. The building remains as their monument, and still functions as an education centre.

> That decent apparel, which many of their parents are not capable of providing, was necessary for them to appear in on the Sabbath Day . . . that each boy be provided every year with A Coat, Trousers, Pair of breeches, Shirt, Hat, Pair of Stockings, Neckerchief and pair of shoes.[17]

But a number of practical questions had to be asked

> What the expense of clothing the children may be; in what manner their clothes are to be taken care of – if a boy leaves the school, is he to return his clothing and the boy who succeeds him to have it . . . and if he should be larger? . . .[18]

The matter was dropped and money was spent on new surplices which had the advantage of fitting a variety of shapes and sizes.

Money was also spent on chairs, knives, forks, glasses and earthenware 'in such quantity as may be sufficient'. This unusual list of items needs explanation. Every year the Beneficial Society treated themselves to a banquet, and, on the following day, the Charity Children celebrated, no doubt making good use of the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table.

During Joseph Scullard's twenty year period as schoolmaster, the number of Charity Boys increased from 30 to 80. All of them were supported by the Society, as the school at that time was exclusively for non-paying boys, sons of the very poor. The increase reflects the growing prosperity of the Society, especially the patronage of honorary members. Earlier, one of them, John Godwin, who became Mayor of Portsmouth, proposed 'that ten boys be added and that their education be paid for by honorary members',[19] and this practice of offering occasional scholarships continued until the Society decided 'that in future, for every four new honorary members admitted to the Society one extra boy would be admitted to the school'.[20] In 1808 Ebenezer Vavasour gave a hundred pounds to the Society 'towards the education of poor children of the Parish' and this covered four more admissions.[21]

John Stephens held the post of schoolmaster at a time when Portsmouth and Portsea struggled against the effects of the depression that followed the war with Napoleon. When he was appointed in 1813 there was a peak of 3,582 men working in the dockyard; when he died nine years later in 1822 the number had been reduced to 2,200. The effect of these redundancies and of the reduction in wages earned by those still working undermined the town's economy and caused much distress. Inevitably the Beneficial School suffered.[22]

Though the pinch was felt early no drastic action was taken till 1818 when the Society decided that it could no longer support 80 Charity boys on the arrangement made in the prosperous pre-war days when the schoolmaster was given one guinea a year for each boy. Supplying books and stationery was expensive too. They therefore resolved to dismiss 25 of the 80 boys and to cut John Stephens' salary from £80 to £60 per annum, 'until debts of the society are liquidated'.[23] Instead of reacting angrily Stephens went one step further and 'very generously offered to educate the Boys Gratis from the present time to the next Monthly night'.[24] He also offered to take in paying day scholars to compensate for the loss. But to no avail. A fortnight later the blow fell more heavily. Ten more boys had to go, and then a further five.

The depressing times seem to be reflected in a trivial schoolboy encounter, fought out in 1818, and which became a Beneficial School legend, quoted by James Breaks. He says

> 1818 was not long after Waterloo and the long wars, principally between the French and us, which left a desire for fighting, especially with boys, and general battles between neighbouring schools. Single combats were generally made up during school hours and the battleground was the Mill Dam. When school was over in the evening you would see a group of boys, angry words were passing between them. A division would then take place, and form two groups, each wending their own way to the Mill Dam, when a fight would be seen, some lasting over an hour. One fight I recollect, between a boy named Webb and another lasted 1 hour and 20 minutes. The two boys were so knocked about as to be unable to appear again in School for a fortnight.[25]

Another incident, innocent looking in itself, was to lead to John Stephens' dismissal as schoolmaster. The Society's books, it was alleged, contained entries which could be interpreted as evidence 'of some jollifications not allowed by the Law of the Society'.[26] Whatever they were cannot be ascertained because the book or books have disappeared. But there is the witness of a Mr Blessed and Charles Gladstair maintaining that John Stephens had expressed his intention of 'getting rid of the books', and wishing 'to destroy or obliterate them'. The accusation was made that he had given the books to one of the boys, with instructions to take them to a local address and deliver them to the occupant. However, on the way, the boy was waylaid, set upon and robbed. The boy returned to John Stephens to explain what had happened. By way of added detail the account tells how the schoolmaster, with notable absence of sympathy, flogged the boy for losing the books.

When, in due course, the Beneficial Society investigated the loss of its books, it took its stand on the evidence available and decided

> that John Stephens the Schoolmaster was the projector as well as the person who carried into practice the abstraction of the Society's books . . . and unanimously arrive at the conclusion that the said John Stephens is unfit and unworthy to be again entrusted with the management of the school.[27]

He was dismissed.

One of the witnesses particularly insistent in exposing John Stephens was Charles Gladstair. Yet it was he who succeeded him in his post as schoolmaster. One is left to wonder how actively Gladstair ensured his own appointment and whether there was any self interest in his evidence against Stephens. Strangely the procedure that had been followed in selecting the two previous schoolmasters was not followed. Gladstair was appointed with minimum concern for procedure. Is it possible he elbowed himself into the post? In the light of his future irregularities and embezzlement of funds which led to his own dismissal in 1826, the reader of the records might be forgiven for suspecting his motives, and for looking upon John Stephens' conduct as well as his jollifications with a kindly eye.

An insight into Gladstair's character comes from an old boy of his, James Breaks. In a letter written in Australia at the end of the century to the school he recalls Charles Gladstair as his first headmaster. Although Breaks was only about twelve at the time he paints an interesting picture of him

> My first master was a Mr Gladstair, a tall man, slightly roundshouldered, and wearing a rusty suit of black, with a swallow tailcoat. Mr Gladstair was said to be a clever man, and in proof of that, he was able to write the 'Lord's Prayer' upon a piece of paper the size of a sixpence. Whatever else he was clever in I have no recollection, nor do I know what call he had for any special cleverness for the subjects he taught were very limited. No boy was expected to go beyond the Single Rule of Three as it was then called, and but very few got beyond the first simple rules. As for Grammar, Geography or History, it was never heard of. The good old Church Catechism was early taught, and for the more advanced 'The faith and duty of a Christian' was introduced, but the quotation of the text was much dreaded. A good handwriting was a special thing, and I have now in my possession a sheet prepared for the inspection of the Members of the Annual Feast which I am rather proud of. It is a combination of German Text cursive printing etc and for a boy of $12\frac{1}{2}$ years it is better than you would get from boys at the present day of the same age. Mr Gladstair seemed to be an easy going man, one who was prepared to 'let the world slide'. He was addicted to a very bad habit. In the warm summer afternoons, a boy was sometimes despatched to the Public House opposite (I forget the sign of the house, but it was kept by a man named Talbot) for a pint of ale or stout which Mr Gladstair placed on a desk near the Southampton Row side, he would sit on the desk, and place one foot on the form sideways in front of it, and sipping now and then, would soon begin to doze. As soon as that was noticed a general hum soon increased in volume until it became so loud as to awake the Master who would spring to his feet, give a violent blow on the desk with his cane and all would be quiet in a moment. Fancy a Master at the present day (1897) sitting more than half asleep, with a pewter mug of beer before him. Mr Gladstair received a salary of £100 per annum, which was considered a high figure at that time. I had, as near as I can remember, two years with Mr Gladstair. He had no assistant. The classes each had a 'Monitor' a boy selected from the first class and that was all.[28]

Like his predecessors, Charles Gladstair, in his capacity as schoolmaster, wrote up the minute books of the Society and kept the accounts. But a notable deterioration in presentation coincides with his later years. He became slipshod, and it comes as no surprise to hear that the Society sensed that something was wrong. His misappropriation of funds, not traceable since he kept the accounts himself, and his abuse of the trust placed in him were shattering blows to a Society not yet recovered from the slump years. Suddenly the writing changes, and a new scribe makes the cryptic entry: 'that all monies paid by Members to Mr Gladstair and which appear unpaid in the books, if satisfactorily proved, shall be allowed'.[29] He was dismissed.

The Madras System 1826–62

The selection of William White as the new headmaster was a happy one. He had been teaching at the Portsea National School, and very successfully. He was acquainted with the 'new' methods of teaching promoted by Bell and Lancaster and had used them. Here was the man to put the Beneficial School on its feet again after the depressed period it had been through, and to steady it after the Gladstair troubles. He was virtually handpicked. Sadly though, he was a sick man, and was to remain in office for only three years. But three years can give an enterprising headmaster

sufficient opportunity to put things right and set a new course. His successor, Thomas Slade, described him as 'probably one of the best masters the society had ever had, for in about two and half or three years he worked the school up to nearly or quite 280 boys'.[30] Probably nearer to the true reason for William White's success is the assessment of one of his old boys

> Mr White was really a good and fine young man, and was highly respected, and I think I may say loved, if there ever was such a thing as love for a schoolmaster. I recollect that my mother with some others going to the school personally thanked him for his attention to the boys.[31]

This, in fact, is a tribute to William White as a teacher, Christian and gentleman, and reflects the school's philosophy expressed by Thomas Mariner, secretary to the Beneficial Society in his preface to the updated 'Laws and Regulations', 1829. He sees the role of the school as

> . . . training the boys in right habits, and instilling into their minds useful knowledge, correct views of duty, and a decided bias towards the practice of it . . . whereby they might become useful members of the community and truly respectable in their general stations in life . . . inculcating the patriotic and truly British feeling of loyalty to their King and the love of their country and neighbour and cherishing those sublime and momentous duties which Christianity so earnestly enjoins . . .[32]

The astonishing increase in the numbers of boys from 40 to 280 in three years needs some explanation. The number of Charity Boys sponsored by the Beneficial Society remained at 40, perhaps with a slight increase; the rest came when the Society opened the doors of its school to other boys in the neighbourhood whose parents were prepared to pay a fee of one penny a week. No extra staff was necessary, as Mr White was able to cope with any number of boys the hall could accommodate, by using monitors. He taught the top group and kept a stern eye on the others; his top group in turn would pass on the instruction received. At the most, he used an Usher, mainly to help with discipline.

This method was used by Andrew Bell (1753–1832), a Church of England minister, superintendent of the Madras Male Orphan Asylum in India, in his efforts to cope with large numbers of children, in 1789. On his return to England he used the same method and the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church adopted it. It had the merit of being cheap, and, so long as education was regarded as a mechanical process of instilling facts into the minds of children, it was workable. Joseph Lancaster (1778–1838) also pioneered it in Southwark in 1801 as he could not afford to pay assistants, but preferred not to associate his schools with denominational teaching; this non-conformist view was taken up by the British and Foreign Schools Society. In Portsmouth, January 1812, the Corporation granted a site for a Lancastrian School in White Swan Fields, opposite the present Theatre Royal. A Bell School, in Green Row (Pembroke Road) was founded in February 1812, and another, serving Portsea, was erected in Upper Clarence Street the same year, and yet another at Bonfire Place. The three schools came under the aegis of the National Society, and benefited from the first Government grants ever made for education. An effort was made to include the Beneficial School under the National Society umbrella. It came from the Hampshire Society in 1814, in John Scullard's time as headmaster, when there were only 80 pupils. The invitation requested the Beneficial Society to 'take into consideration the practicability of placing your school on Dr Bell's plan and uniting it with the other schools in the county conducted on the same system'.[33] The Society replied

> declining uniting with the Hampshire Central Society, at the same time take the liberty to inform them, that a partial adoption of Dr Bell's System of Education has already taken place and that the children entrusted to the care of the Beneficial Society, have from the Institution of the School in the year 1755 to the present time been carefully instructed in The Principles and Doctrines of the Church of England and regularly and strictly attend Divine Service Morning and Afternoon at St John Chapel, Portsea.[34]

No doubt the impact which the four schools were making with their mass teaching methods, or the Madras System, as they called it then, was felt by the Society, and they reacted to it again in 1822, when the Beneficial School was at its lowest ebb with forty boys and the Gladstair scandal upon it. In April of that year, 'a special meeting of the Honorary Members and Beneficial members, was convened . . . and it was proposed that the Madras System of Education be adopted in the School', and the sub-committee of forty-two members, half Honorary and half Beneficial, met to

> draw up such observations and regulations, for the future government of the school, as to them might seem proper; . . . and resolved that the Madras

> System of education be adopted in the Society's school under the direction of thirteen superintendents, to be comprised of Honorary and Beneficial Members.[35]

This move virtually established a board of governors, opened up the school to non-charity boys and relieved a social problem in the area around the Hard. The cosy school where never more than 80 charity children attended became an open school for boys, and the numbers increased dramatically. The changed face is illustrated in the mass examination which took place in the hall 'when upwards of two hundred and fifty boys were present, more than fifty were presented with medals, for having distinguished themselves in their classes'.[36] One of those boys wrote

> I left the school with two medals which I have in my possession, one, in red, white and blue ribbon . . . I received a Parchment Certificate in a Tin box, stating the number of days I had attended school.[37]

William White, whose previous experience in a Portsea Bell School had prepared him to carry out these changes, died in 1829. The Society expressed 'their sincere regret at the loss sustained in the death of the late schoolmaster whose qualifications so fitted him for the situation in which he acquitted himself to the great advantage of the school'.[38]

The dilemma in which the thirteen superintendents found themselves in seeking an adequate successor was worsened by the performance of Mr Levett, a schoolmaster from the Green Row School, Portsmouth, in whom they had placed their hopes. He simply was unable to keep order. This was only too apparent within the space of a few days. Teachers who understand boys will know what it means when a class acts in unison; one boy, undetected, bangs a desk or hisses, drawing the master's eye in his direction, when immediately a boy in another part of the classroom does the same and so on, till all is pandemonium, and a demented teacher has lost control. The story is told graphically by one of those present

> There were some big boys, mostly from Common Hard, sons of watermen. These boys seem to have noticed Mr Levett's weaknesses very quickly, and the very first morning they began hissing. It commenced in one corner, and when he looked to see where it came from, they were quiet, and the hissing was taken up on the other side. Poor man, he looked so pale and agitated, frightened I may say, that the hissing became general, and gradually worked itself up till it became a perfect yell. He selected a little boy, and attempted to punish him, but the big brother of the boy went forward with a slate and threatened to sling it at his head if he did it again. There was no improvement on the second day, and, on the third he did not put in an appearance. Exit Levett.[39]

The President of the Society, Mr Joseph Frost, took over temporarily. Meanwhile a call for applications had been sent out, requesting candidates to 'send specimens of their handwriting, testimonials, and certificates of character and ability' and specified that

> they were to be no more than thirty years of age and of good bodily constitution; the boys were to be instructed in the Religious Principles of the Church of England, taught reading, writing and arithmetic on the Madras System.[40]

It is interesting to see how the interviews were carried out

> at one and the same time they wrote by dictation the precept 'Do unto others as you would they should do unto you'. As to spelling, punctuation and accuracy in writing, each candidate then wrote by dictation a passage of a half a page from Paley's Evidences of Christianity. As to Arithmetic, a copy of 10 printed questions was delivered to each candidate to work out sums, and to give answers. The Committee then examined the candidates as to their practice as masters or teachers, and particularly their knowledge of the Madras System.[41]

Such a method might not appeal to interviewers nowadays, but it was to produce a master of exceptional merit in the person of Thomas Slade. 'He was a sharp man,' wrote an Old Boy who was a pupil at the time, 'with a keen eye.' There were two or three attempts to start a Levett game (classroom hissing) but Mr Slade spotted the right boy at once, 'let him have the cane, right and left, and all was peace and quiet'.[42]

No doubt Thomas Slade was a disciplinarian. He used corporal punishment in the manner not uncommon at the time. The same Old Boy writes:

> The cane was invariably used. Sometimes it was administered on the palm of the hand, but more generally upon any part of the body, right and left. At times, for more serious offences there was a kind of Military or Naval punishment used, not with the Cat but with the birch. The boy was made to strip,

or at least to lower his braces, let his trousers down and receive his dose on the lower part of his back, or as it was vulgarly termed his 'backside', and the doctor was summoned to witness it. One Dr Porter, an old gentleman living in St George's Square, generally attended. These were generally resorted to for theft, or persistent truant playing. Two boys held each hand of the culprit and he was pulled up tightly to one of those square wooden pillars which support the hall overhead. I went through one of these operations myself, and for a very trifling thing. A boy sitting beside me, had a choice little bow and arrow which he secreted behind him, and which I persuaded him just to let me look at, and I could not resist the temptation to try it. The arrow went across the school and hit a boy on the other side, but I didn't think it hurt him, but I was pulled up to the Pillar and birched for this heinous crime. The disgrace of having to expose one's person was the principal thing in this punishment. People believed in punishment in those days, and it was not an uncommon thing for a woman to ask the Master to punish her boy for some offence committed at home.[43]

However unacceptable corporal punishment has become in today's world, it was accepted by teacher, child and parent in early Victorian times, and Thomas Slade, disciplinarian, with a reputation for fairness, won esteem.

There was discussion at the time about starting a Beneficial Girls' School. The Preface of the Society's revised Rules of 1829 speaks of

> the vast importance of extending the Charity to poor Female Children . . . the valuable consequences that would result from rescuing that useful part of the sex from low habits of vice and idleness, and training them in a moral and religious course of life, directing their steps in the unerring path, which leads through temporal welfare to eternal bliss . . . to become virtuous and happy mothers of brave and worthy citizens.[44]

The writer no doubt has made his point.

It was Thomas Slade who suggested that the Society should actually take the necessary steps to extend its educational work to include girls. Within a few weeks the suggestion became reality. A committee was formed to explore the possibilities and reported to the General Meeting of the Society at the beginning of May 1836; it won the Society's agreement

> that the portion of the premises described in the Committee's report, and the house at the north end of the building (proposed to be purchased from Mr Warn) be taken down to make room for the intended school, according to the plans and specifications laid before the meeting; and that as the promised subscription and donations to that object fully justify such proceedings, the Committee be authorised to proceed with the undertaking.[45]

Before the month of May was out, the foundation stone of the new extension was laid by the Mayor of Portsmouth, Edward Carter, the nephew of Sir John Carter who had presided over the original boys' foundation in 1785. Mrs Charlotte White, the widow of William White who had

'. . . cherishing those duties . . . which Christianity so earnestly enjoins . . .' School Assembly. Note the pillars and reference 43 on page 10
Courtesy of Miss G Johnson

been headmaster of the Beneficial School 1826–9, was appointed first headmistress of the girl's school, which was opened on the 6 February 1837. In October of that year there were 136 girls on the register.

As so often happens when women are anxious to support a venture, they lost no time in forming a Ladies Committee to raise funds. While the Masonic Brethren gave a ball to raise £50 for clothing the children, the ladies realised £140 from their first bazaar. So it became possible to provide schoolgirls with a uniform, the boys with surplices, and both with food. At the same time the debts incurred in renovating the school buildings and building the extension, were wiped out in time for the centenary celebration of 1854.

Much of this fund raising activity was a response to the publication of Dr Henry Slight's sanitary report. The years had taken their toll of the Beneficial School, and building the extension had revealed serious deterioration in the existing fabric. In 1851 Dr Slight wrote, under the heading Beneficial Schools, Kent Street, (boys and girls):

> These schools are held in two rooms on the ground floor of the Beneficial Society's Hall. The boys' room is 58 x 30 x 13 feet and the girls 34 x 30 x 13. The rooms are ventilated by six windows at the side, and one large one at the end; but being closely surrounded by buildings they are dark and close. Average scholars 240 boys, girls 108 and the hours of study are seven daily. There is no playground. Rooms are warmed by open grates. The W.C. and privy are outside the building emptying into a cesspool, the urinal passes into the street gutter. Average absence from sickness: girls 6, boys 9. The lads occasionally, and always on Sundays, wear white surplices; they consider this a mark of superiority.[46]

James Break's memory of his schooldays are equally descriptive

> . . . the dark, dingy, cold and miserable Beneficial School of my time . . .. I never saw a fire. There was no gas. Light and heat cost money, and had to be done without. Besides those luxuries would tend to make the boys effeminate, and the object then was to turn out hardy boys. There were two fire-places in the room, put there, I suppose, for cooking purposes, for there was a Colossal Roasting apparatus over one of them, with spits connected, fit to roast a whole sheep, but they were never used to warm the school. The front windows were bounded by that notorious ditch called 'Southampton Row'. There was a small classroom at the north end, where there was a tolerable light, but the N.E. corner leading to the W.C. was a complete dark hole and never could be opened during warm weather for ventilation, on account of the unpleasant stench.[47]

Mrs J. Stanford's description of the girls' school in the mid-nineteenth century is worth repeating here

> the girls had to suffer the nuisances caused by stables underneath the schoolroom, which meant not only the noises of horses and dogs and the bad language of the stable lads but also the offensive smell from a dungheap. However the unfortunate headmistress was obliged to wage a constant war against the dirt and depravity that existed in the area served by the school. Children were sent home if they arrived unwashed or with verminous heads or dirty pinafores. The district surrounding the school was rather notorious and the mistress had to endure interference from local low women, especially the keeper of a beerhouse who with her cronies frequently infested the steps of the school, using foul language, and even penetrated inside to hurl abuse at the girls who stayed after school to sweep the floors. Indeed such were the scenes outside the school with 'profligate women dancing to the music of a street organ' that the headmistress asked for blinds for the windows and frequently kept them down, though this darkened the schoolroom. The notoriety of the neighbourhood was such that the children had repeatedly to be warned against playing outside the school or loitering near it, and the doors had to be opened early in the morning with a teacher ready to take charge before the school day began.[48]

Thomas Slade who had to contend with these problems was to influence the school to such an extent that he stands out as possibly the most effective headmaster in the history of the school. In terms of time, his span of 25 years as headmaster, was the longest, and, for a long period after his retirement, he continued to serve as superintendent. As a day to day headmaster and teacher he was highly thought of. The Report Book, 1837–47,[49] kept by the visiting Superintendents, is full of appreciation: 'visited and found the school very orderly', 'I have today visited the school when there were present 258 boys, the whole of whom were very orderly and attentive . . .' and so the entries continue. The entry 'visited the school and heard that H. Wheeler and J. Burfleet had committed nuisance in Church' is about the only one that might cause a raised eyebrow.

Thomas Slade started a 'Record of Old Scholars' where jottings of the exploits of Old Boys would be entered. Unfortunately only a few entries appear, but the idea was excellent, as can be seen from the record of John Kingswell, pupil 1836–8.

> Left school 1838 at the age of 11, entered Dockyard, apprenticed shipwright 1841. 1850 went to sea as carpenter in H.M.S. Dragon, 1852 in 'Tiger' wrecked in Black Sea, fired on by Russians. Capt. Giffard and six other killed, rest taken prisoners, fared badly for 2 months, sent back to the 'Britannia' Admiral's ship, sent on shore, took part in engagement there. All sent home in 1855, tried on 'Victory'; honourably acquitted, and promoted to Warrant Officer, 1859 served in 'Encounter' on China station fought against rebels, wounded in leg, and invalided in 1864, subsequently served in 'Urgent' 'Royal Oak' and 'Sultan'. 1876 in 'Thunderer', on board at time of boiler explosion, 45 men killed. 1877 in 'Terror' on Bermuda Station, 1880 promoted to Chief Carpenter. Retired 1881, with 3 medals, 2 clasps, 31 years' service.[50]

Another Old Boy of his emigrated to Australia in 1840 and eventually became a member of the Legislative Council in 1857 in Adelaide where he served for 36 years including 12 years as President of the Legislative Assembly, and was seven times Premier of South Australia. This was Sir Henry Ayres, KC, MG after whom the Ayres Rock was named by Gosse in 1873. He wrote from Adelaide: 'I was glad to hear that my old friend Mr Thomas Slade was still in the land of the living and able to continue his usefulness to the Society'[51] a reference to Thomas Slade serving the school as superintendent and advisor during his years of retirement; in the letter he makes a donation with the request to become an honorary member of the Beneficial Society.

Thomas Slade was only 48 years old when he resigned in 1852 and was to live on into his 92nd year. At a function to celebrate his fifty years connection with the school as headmaster, superintendent and advisor, the President of the Beneficial Society, D. T. Wooster said how 'he had held the position of headmaster with honour and credit to himself and with the greatest satisfaction to the whole of the members, which was proved by the fact of the portrait they then saw hanging on the wall before them.'[52] In his reply Mr Slade outlined the highlights of his period as headmaster

> About the period of the Prince of Wales's birth, they dined nearly 300 children on St George's Square, and afterwards marched to the Common . . . and in the following year, such was the increase in the children to be educated, that, on attending at All Saints' Church, they had 320 Boys and 164 girls.[53]

But Thomas Slade was esteemed more for his wholehearted involvement in the school than for the increase in numbers.

The advertisements placed with the *Hampshire Telegraph*, the *Portsmouth Guardian* and the *Portsmouth Times* seeking a new headmaster reveal a few details of the school in 1852

> A Schoolmaster to the Beneficial Society School will be required immediately after the midsummer vacation. Salary 85£ pr. annum (exclusive of the Government allowance). There are Five Pupil Teachers, Two of them just finishing their Fourth year of apprenticeship. Number of boys about 240. Candidates for the same not more than 35 years of age.[54]

Testimonials were

> received from Mr Burge of the Portsea Free School; they were of first rate Character as regards his moral and religious reputation and of his management of

'. . . mothers to be'. The five year olds, c 1895
Courtesy of Miss G Johnson

> the Free School, but in the opinion of this Meeting his attainments otherwise were not of that high Character to authorise this Meeting in recommending him.[55]

No one else was considered, so an advertisement was placed with the *London Times* and six applicants were interviewed, the choice falling on Mr Sholto James Salisbury from Storrington, in Sussex. He was 24, had obtained a Certificate of Merit, Second Division, Second Class, and was a member of the Established Church.

The outstanding event in James Salisbury's ten year spell as headmaster was undoubtedly the Centenary celebrations of the Society and School. It was an occasion for speeches and banquets. With commendable tolerance the children endured the speeches in the superior interest in the banquets, and drew the tongue-in-cheek comment from the Society's secretary: 'the Children of the Schools dined in the Hall, their behaviour and the ability they displayed in removing the good things placed before them gave the highest satisfaction'.[56] A similar tongue-in-cheek comment, or one would like to think it so, appears in the same minute book after another feast: 'the Children of the schools had their Annual Dinner in the Hall. The Chair was taken by the President and Mr John Shepphard addressed the children in very appropriate terms'.[57]

Like many a headmaster he found himself obliged to press his staff, all pupil teachers, to avoid being absent, insisting that 'no Apprentice Teacher be absent under any pretext whatsover, except in case of serious illness, in which case a Certificate signed by a duly qualified Medical Practitioner be sent'.[58] When a case of immoral conduct arose with one of the apprentice teachers he placed a sad report with the superintendents, who interviewed the man and directed that 'immediate steps be taken for cancelling his Indentures . . . and that a copy of the Resolution be forwarded to HM Inspector of Schools for the district'.[59] The reply from the Council Officer was severe: 'he must forfeit his stipend and no gratuity can be allowed on his behalf. My Lords wish this forfeiture to be made generally known in the School, and also the reason for it.'[60]

At this time, up and down the country, conditions in schools were improving with the Whig schemes for inspections and the application of the pupil-teacher system. James Kay-Shuttleworth stressed that the inspectorate was created 'to provide the promoters of such efforts with the opportunity of learning what improvements in school management and discipline and in the methods of teaching have been sanctioned'.[61] In 1839 the Whig government 'proposed a system of grants to be allocated according to need and administered directly by the State, working through the Privy Council and a corps of government inspectors'.[62] The Beneficial School took advantage of this, and welcomed the advice of the inspector, and, even more so, the available grant. Having submitted himself and the school to inspection, in 1857, James Salisbury was cheered with the news that he was to receive a capitation grant from the Committee of Council in Education to be 'divided as following. One third to the Master, or Mistress, one third to the Children, and the remaining third to be added to the School Fund.'[63]

It should be noted that before then the Beneficial School had received no grants at all. In 1833 the Whig Reform Ministry, with Brougham Lord Chancellor, voted £20,000 to aid school building, to be distributed through the National Society, which represented Anglican interests, and the British Society which had Dissenter support. This helped to avoid denominational conflict, although the bulk of the funds, as much as 80 per cent, went to the National Society. The Beneficial School, not being attached to either body, received no funds.

Grants, however, awarded as they were to schools winning good reports from the inspectors, take their toll in worries from members of staff, and none more so than from a young headmaster. James Salisbury resigned at the end of 1861, and the Committee of Superintendents met to

> express the sense of the value of the service of Mr Salisbury during the years he has conducted the School, and to say that in retiring from the Sphere of duty, he carries with him the best wishes of this Society for his future success in life.[64]

His successor was James Slade.

New Methods – Class Teaching 1862–1939

That James Slade was indeed the son of former headmaster Thomas Slade is confirmed in a letter from Sir Henry Ayres, KC, MG, writing from Australia: 'I was glad to hear . . . that the office formerly held by him, the duties of which he so well discharged, are now fulfilled by yourself, his son. It is not always that a man can fill his father's place.'[65] In that one generation, however, the fashion and method of schooling had changed radically. Thomas, the father, 1829–52, ran the school on monitorial lines, the Madras System being in vogue; James Slade became headmaster when 'new methods' of class teaching excited the progressives. 'The private class system', they called it. The Beneficial School caught up with it, and 'agreed the Private Class teaching was beneficial to the improvement of the School both in retaining the older scholars and in raising the standard of education in the School'.[66] But it was more expensive. Class teachers were a new species, not to

be content with pupil-teacher wages. To cover the extra costs the Society decided 'that all boys who enter this Private class shall pay 2*d* extra to the usual 1*d*, that one half shall go to the Master'.[67] So the deed was done. There was to be a 3*d* a week fee paying *élite* entitled to class teaching. James Slade said that it had been customary for many years for the Schoolmaster to pay the Monitors the sums of 9*d*, 6*d* and 3*d* per week for teaching. He paid them from his own pocket, and hoped for reimbursement. He thought it better that 'Pupil Teachers be paid 3*d* per week, increasing 1*d* per year for 5 years'.[68] Meanwhile the Private Class Master could assume a superior air and enjoy his higher salary.

The urge to be up-to-date is strong in all schools. In the 1870s the use of slides and the magic lantern attracted the go-ahead teacher. James Slade was one of them: 'I venture to ask for the loan of $1\frac{1}{2}$ doz. slides per fortnight. I would take the greatest care of them myself and returning them myself immediately on using them.'[69] Also compelling is the urge to take advantage of important occasions which serve to interest and excite the children, and offer a little classroom relief to the harassed teacher

> . . . noticing the kind invitation to have allotted places for the children at the arrival of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, hereby respectfully avail themselves of the opportunity. There would be about 360 children, and all the boys, 250, would wear white surplices with numerous blue and gilt sashes.'[70]

And there are day to day worries: 'I am sorry to be obliged to Trouble you with another communication respecting the Water taps here but the smell from the closets is so offensive that the children turn sick and our heads quite ache.'[71]

This last item brings us down to earth. It is good to have an idea of conditions in Portsea at the time. 'Do you know Portsea?' wrote Reginald Shutte in 1870

> you must have been elbowed off the pavement by bloated, draggled women in dirty print frocks, who lounge in twos or threes without bonnet or shawl, and who in broad daylight make your flesh creep with their loathsome words and gestures. These are some of the companions of our soldiers and sailors . . .. If you have penetrated into the dens of lust and violence which are closely packed within the slice of brick and mortar that lies between St George's Square and Queen Street, your heart will have been sickened, and you will be giddy with sights and sounds which your brain refuses to forget . . .. Here is the landing place for sailors of every country; here our Indian troopships discharge their invalids . . .. Not a regiment marches out of garrison, not a ship sails from the port, but they leave their marks behind, deserted women and children, and a swarm of destitute and disappointed followers.[72]

This is the area the Beneficial School served, and allowing for exaggeration, these were the conditions in which the children who came to James Slade for education lived.

James Slade kept a log book which gives a glimpse of mid-Victorian school life among the poor of Portsea. Teachers, and others, will find a sample of his comments thought-evoking. 'Boys cautioned respecting attendance on Sundays'; 'Distributed clothing'; 'Found Williams had been deceiving me all the week'; 'Preparing for the Prince of Wales Wedding Day'; 'The boy Deck fell off the pier and nearly drowned'; 'Warned Mr Williams that if his son does not show a marked improvement, unpleasant steps will have to be taken; Mr Williams expressed himself very independently'; 'Nomination day for Members of Parliament. Children went home early. Hustings began at 12.30'; 'Many boys away in consequence of a fleet being at Spithead and they being engaged by the boats attending them'; 'Mr Miller threatened to insult his son's teacher for not allowing his boy to leave the room'.[73]

Just four years before James Slade was appointed headmaster, the Newcastle Commission proposed that the amount of money schools received out of the rates should depend on the performance of each child in a yearly examination in the three R's. A special county inspector was to act as examiner. This would leave the central government free to give additional financial help on a different basis. It all seemed tidy and plausible. But the seeds of much trouble were sown. The principle of 'payment by results' brought its share of anxiety to heads and staff and children and no doubt to parents too. Then in the Revised Code, all school grants, apart from those for buildings, were replaced by an annual capitation grant of 12*s* per child; four shillings of this depended on the child's attendance, and eight shillings on his performance in the three R's. It must be said that schools were free enough to become 'inspected' schools with the lure of a grant, or to remain uninspected and grantless. The Beneficial School opted for inspection.

Alas, it brought its troubles. After the first honeymoon inspections the blow fell. In November 1876 there was an adverse report, followed in May 1877 by a special meeting

> Her Majesty's Inspector met the Officers . . . and adjourned to the Hall where defects in accommodation were pointed out, and also the darkness in the boys old schoolroom together with the unfit state of

> the closets . . . He also inspected the land adjoining, suggesting the clearing out of the land and fitting it up with necessary closet accommodation and letting in large windows all down the dark side . . .. Upon leaving he distinctly stated that no grant from the present should be given and that fresh arrangements would have to be made with the Government in order to receive any future grant from the Council Office.[74]

The official report confirmed this, and, among many painful moves to adapt to the new circumstances, the headmaster's salary was cut.

One of James Slade's early initiatives was to open the Beneficial School to infants. It will be remembered that his father Thomas Slade had started a girls' school. So infants began to enter and gradually took up space in buildings that were already crowded. To ease matters, premises in St George's Square were obtained, and used for the girls from January 1870. After three years they moved to a room adjoining St George's Chapel. But although the moved helped to ease the space problem, the Inspector would not look kindly on infants being taught with older children. A number of makeshift arrangements were devised, like running a mixed infants' school in the front hall, or continue in the old rooms in St George's Square with a former pupil-teacher in charge. Proposals to build were put forward, one in the vicinity of the Beneficial School itself, and one near St George's Chapel. However no available site could be acquired. In any case all plans had to be deferred after that disastrous inspection of May 1877.

To add to these worries, the Board of Education Act of 1870 had led to a large programme of school building in Portsmouth, including that of a potentially rival school in Kent Street itself. Although the Society protested, no notice was taken. James Slade had been shaken by the turn of events and was thinking of resigning. His salary which had already been cut, was further diminished when the Society dispensed with his services as Secretary. Since the days of William Cox the schoolmaster had covered these duties. Now there was to be an appointed secretary. The loss in Slade's salary can be measured by the proposal that the new 'secretary be paid $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent of all moneys collected and £5 for conducting correspondence, and performing all the clerical work of the Society'.[75]

Radical measures had to be taken to save the school. Fortunately Honorary Member patronage was strong. Sir F. Fitzwygram, from Leigh Park, supported a proposal from Mr J. Gillham 'that the sanitary conditions of the Building be made to meet the requirements of the Local Authority, the expenses to be met by the funds of the Society and not to exceed £300'.[76] He called for efficient measures to be taken and every possible effort made to regain the Government grant, and that included 'engaging a Competent Master at £120 per annum'.

Caught up in the turmoil and not a little distressed by it all, James Slade resigned. Miss Dennis, headmistress of the Girls' School also resigned, and, two months later, Slade's temporary replacement, a Mr Privett, resigned too. The Beneficial Girls' School was also a casualty. In the words of the compiler of the preface to the Revised Laws

> considerable and serious difficulties which for some time had existed in connection with the Girls' Schools, owing to the building being pronounced unsuitable by Her Majesty's Inspector, and the officers being unable to procure a more suitable building, it was most reluctantly resolved to close the same for the present, and to continue the Boys' School in the Hall. The Infant Department for Boys was re-opened.[77]

The Beneficial School had served the Portsea area for about a century when Charles Hunt appeared during the period of educational expansion following the Education Act of 1870. Board schools were being erected in the Portsmouth area absorbing the children of all classes of residents. No longer was the Beneficial School alone. It had to compete with other schools and contend with inspectors insistent on acceptable standards if grants were to be awarded, and struggle along in a climate created by the system of 'payment by results'.

After the triple resignation the Society trod cautiously

> Charles Hunt was engaged as temporary Master of the Boys' School for three months from 20 August 1877 at a rate of £120 per annum, and, if satisfactory, to both parties, with view to his permanent engagement.[78]

In November his appointment was confirmed, and he was 'authorised to engage an assistant Master at a Salary not exceeding £50 per annum'. He was fortunate enough to have an excellent Pupil Teacher, holding a Queen's Scholarship, awarded on examination by HMIs and the Principals of the Normal Schools.

Everything seemed to be right, and the records reflect an enthusiastic attempt to accept the challenge. The minutes read: 'that a Partition 8 ft in height, and of so portable a construction as to be available for Tables be erected', 'that an amount not exceeding £3 for Models etc. in accordance with the Head Master's explanations be

granted', 'that Mr Hunt return the Magic Lantern Slides . . .',[79] all pointing to the use of visual aids, a new fashion much favoured by a progressive inspectorate. But inspectors, down to earth, wanted improvement in the three R's. Their report on the year 1876–7 was blunt

> The boys have passed a very poor examination both in Standard Work and Class Subjects. The present master has only had charge for a few months and is not responsible for the unsatisfactory results. My Lords have ordered the Grant to the Boys' School to be reduced by one third, under Article 32(b) for defective instruction.[80]

Yet the school, looked upon in hindsight, seemed to be blossoming. The records read: 'the School has passed a successful Drawing Examination as to be the first school in the District'.[81] There were annual outings, from 1880 onwards, to Leigh Park, at the invitation of Maj. Gen. Sir F. K. Fitzwygram

> upon this day the children marched to the Railway Station, Landport, headed by the Union Band, and accompanied by the Schoolmaster, Assistant Master and Staff, for the purpose of proceeding to Havant, thence to Leigh Park. The children having much enjoyed themselves, were regaled with an excellent tea, after which they engaged in various games, being generously supplied with food etc, provided by the President, Officers and Friends, a large Booth belonging to Sir Frederick affording ample accommodation for all. The children having sung some school, and other songs, well, cheered lustily. All left Havant and arrived safely at Landport Station soon after Nine O'clock, p.m. Great credit was due to Mr C. F. Hunt for the manner in which the children were catered for and generally attended, throughout the day.[82]

Other entries, this time from Charles Hunt's log book, give glimpses of school life at the time: 'Launch of the Inflexible in Dockyard: school dismissed at 11.30'; 'numerous applications from parents to allow their sons to come home earlier to take father's dinner, on account of a large number of dockyardmen working overtime'; 'birched George Sheppherd for repeated offences'; 'Mr Topham of the United Kingdom Band of Hope Union gave a lecture on Alcohol'.[83]

Indications of social conditions emerge from the admission registers where parents' jobs are entered. Under 1892 we have: labourer Dockyard, sailor, Petty Officer HMS *Crocodile,* organist, naval pensioner, warder, butcher, painter, boiler maker, cab driver, publican, waterman, boatmaker. Under 'boys leaving' we find: 'gone to London', 'gone to work', 'gone to Board School', 'dying of consumption'.

One special occasion stood out. Her Imperial and Royal Highness, the Crown Princess of Germany, laid the foundation stone of the new St Mary's Church, Kingston. According to the Court Circular of 10 August 1887 'the path from the Vicarage to the Church will be lined by the boys of the Beneficial Society's School of which Her Majesty is the Patron'.[84] Other occasions surrounded the Mayor's visits to the school where behaviour had to be of the best and singing well rehearsed: 'the musical service was full choral. The whole was efficiently carried out and reflected great credit on the Head Master Mr Hunt for successfully training the boys for the occasion.'[85] And there was a Royal Visit

> Their Royal Highnesses, the Duke and Duchess of Connaught paid a visit to our school on Wednesday, 2 November, being accompanied and introduced by Sir William King, Sir G. Willis, KCB, Lady Willis and Rev. Canon Jacob.[86]

However colourful all these activities were for the Beneficial School, Charles Hunt, during all his fifteen years as headmaster, had to contend with the nagging insistence of the inspectors for effective teaching and results. 'I cannot

'. . . might I ask you to sanction the purchase of a half a dozen pipes at a cost of 9s for our Band' and School Entertainment
Courtesy of the Portsmouth City Record Office

see', wrote one of them, in 1879, 'that the school has made any progress during the year; the results of the examination are very unsatisfactory. The order is not so good as it might be'.[87] This dismayed the School Management Committee, but they looked for the silver lining and gave Charles Hunt the benefit of the doubt

> they observe that the failures in writing have been proved to their satisfaction to be due to temporary causes which are passing away; that some of the failures are proved to be wilful, of which steps have been taken to prevent recurrence. The Committee see no cause for discouragement and think it necessary to await the result of another year's examination before giving an opinion of Mr Hunt's management of the School.[88]

However, the yearly reports were adverse. In 1880 the inspector pointed out that 'the Elementary Subjects are so poorly done on the whole that it is impossible to recommend any Merit Grant', and so it went on for ten years until, in 1891 'the managers requested that the officers decide whether the School has made sufficient progress to justify retaining the services of Mr Hunt'.[89] They gave him three months notice.

The question must be asked whether the Beneficial School ever became one of the Board Schools. The 1870 Act contained an explicit commitment to a national system of elementary schools and machinery to implement it. It created a new type of local authority, with a school board having power to draw on rates to provide and run new schools where needed. A major problem was how to assimilate the existing voluntary schools built and maintained by private bodies, like the Beneficial School, into the new public system. One course was to take them over completely and let the new boards run them as Board Schools; the other was to let them continue side-by-side with the new Board Schools, treating them as two complementary networks. The religious climate was not yet benign enough to accept that voluntary schools could receive money from the rates. Instead, to compensate them, it was made possible for such schools to have a government grant. Between 1889 and 1891, the Tory Government tried to find a satisfactory formula. Lord Salisbury's 'assisted education' initiative created a new government grant of ten shillings per child in average attendance per year, provided they dispensed with fees. All schools were given the option of accepting this. The Beneficial School sent a circular letter to all parents explaining the Government options and stating

> . . . we are influenced by the fact that already a large proportion of our scholars have their school place remitted, together with our desire to retain the full complement of our scholars, have decided to accept the Fee Grant as offered by the Government and to remit all school pence on and after 31 August . . . we are able to offer a somewhat wider and more advanced education than that usually given in Elementary Schools . . . we offer the special advantage of a fuller and more definite religious education than any that could be allowed under the School Board System . . .[90]

It was clear. There was no intention of becoming a Board School; they chose to dispense with the pennies from the boys, and welcome the ten shilling capitation grant.

The selection of Joseph Theakstone as headmaster in place of Hunt was in the face of competition from 110 candidates, and it was with some sense of relief that Sir William King proposed his acceptance 'as being the most eligible of the whole of the candidates, his credentials and acquirements being in every point satisfactory'.[91] The inspectors thought well of the choice, and their first annual report was favourable: 'discipline has improved very much and is now perfectly satisfactory. By next year I hope to find as great an improvement in the general work of the School'.[92] The following year he reported: 'the Boys are now in excellent order and have made great progress in the elementary subjects'.[93] A wider curriculum developed with much emphasis on Art, encouraged by competitions and awards, and the enthusiasm of an excellent Art Master, C. N. Potter. Music and Geography flourished.

The headmaster's Monthly Reports reveal him as a courageous and constructive head, anxious to use funds profitably. One of them reads

> In the balance sheet of the Society I noticed that no less a sum than £4 11*s* 11*d* was spent on buns distribution on the two occasions we went to Church. I beg to point out that for that sum I could stock our Museum with valuable specimens; or obtain a little apparatus for performing experiments in Chemistry, Magnetism, or Electricity, which would be invaluable in giving Object Lessons; or we could get a new lantern for the school; or again we are greatly in need of desks, and that sum would go a good way. I have no wish to interfere with an old custom which I venture to think was established before buns were so cheap and universally eaten as they are today, but I beg to put in a plea for the better storing of the mental capacities of the lads under our charge.[94]

The Object Lesson was much extolled for its educational virtues in helping children to become observant and discerning, and a school that could include among the objects on show, some sort of scientific apparatus, could justly feel that it had the edge on lesser schools. No doubt the boys themselves thought that buns were well able to stand comparison with museum pieces and experiments in Chemistry, Magnetism and Electricity. The custom of giving them buns can be traced back to the early days of the school, when there was an annual treat, and buns were buns and filled the hungry. Like so many requests of Joseph Theakstone, his suggestions were respected. His applications for teaching aids and classroom supplies were invariably sympathetically considered, even his request for an increase in salary. He inspired confidence, and lifted the school.

When he offered his resignation in 1896, it was received with regret. At the School Prizegiving that December, he received a parting gift, and the Revd C. C. Crowley expressed regret 'at the loss of the services of the Head Mas-

'. . . and to provide Buns for the Scholars'. Miss C Powell accompanies children to St George's Chapel, 1952, to receive their buns.
Courtesy of the Headmistress of the Beneficial School

The custom of receiving buns continues, 1986
Courtesy of Julian Greenwood

ter after a period of four years' useful and approved service'.[95] As chairman of the Managing Committee he wrote later

> The Managers on the eve of your departure, wish to express to you their hope that you be blessed and prosper greatly in your work. On your arrival our school was in a state far from satisfactory, and you leave it 'Excellent'. [96]

The year before Theakstone resigned, an honorary member of the Beneficial Society, Henry Gaselee, founded a scholarship in favour of the Beneficial Society boys for entry into Portsmouth Grammar School, for three years. The sum of 40 guineas was deposited with trustees to mark his son's success in winning a scholarship to Eton. A similar scholarship had been founded to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887. The Gaselee family, over five generations, had been closely connected with the school and Society. Henry's great grandfather, Stephen Gaselee, had made a bequest

> Know all Men . . . I Stephen Gaselee . . . am held and firmly Bound to . . . (make over) Four Hundred Pounds of Lawful Money of Great Britain . . . to pay for the Schooling of as many poor Boys as the said Interest would allow to learn to read, write and Arithmetick to fit them for Trades.[97]

He was Mayor of Portsmouth in 1797 and 1802. His son Justice Gaselee was a much revered and loyal friend. The Society, out of respect, commissioned a portrait of him which hung in the Hall in company with portraits of Sir John Carter, Thomas Slade, King William IV and Queen Victoria.

Ernest Hill became headmaster in the year of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. The Beneficial Society was quick to assert their loyalty:

> To the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty . . .
> This Society which has been the means of educating thousands of children, many of whom have risen to prominent positions in the Legislative assemblies of the Empire, had the great honour of numbering among its Patrons in 1833 your Majesty's beloved Mother, Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent.
> We most respectfully desire to convey to your Majesty the assurance of our loyal devotion. . ..[98]

The boys showed their loyalty by doing justice to a tea provided for them on Governor's Green.

Under Ernest Hill the school quickly assumed the characteristics of elementary schools of the period. 'Presentation of Prizes, Lady Culme-Seymour presiding: proceeded to the large schoolroom where about 200 children were mustered . . . and carried out a programme of physical drill and bar-bell and dumb-bell exercises besides singing two or three choruses . . .'.[99] Adam Ranten, HM Chief Inspector of Schools, wrote afterwards: 'I cannot leave this school without expressing the pleasure which it has given me to see such excellent drill.' Also laudatory was the report of the Diocesan Examiner: 'Sir, I am desired by the Education Committee to convey to you their approbation of the highly satisfactory state of attendance . . . you thrice headed the Monthly Summary with the lowest percentage of absentees against the Non-Provided Boys' Schools under the Committee.'[100] The Society's minute books record that

> a contribution towards the fitting out of the School team who proposed joining the Schools Football League . . . £2.2.0 be given,[101] that a donation be made to the School Athletic Fund, that a grant of £1 be spent on the renovation of the Band Instruments and that, as I (Ernest Hill) am organising a Drum and Fife Band with one drum and four fifes, might I ask you to sanction the purchase of a half a dozen fifes at a cost of 9s.[102]

All this leaves us with thoughts about the cost of things and the value of money, and a feeling that few elementary schools of that period would be able to boast such activities. The school football team were Second Division Champions in 1914–15 and won promotion to the First Division.

Then there were outings

> The 19th Annual Outing will take place on Mon. 17 July 99, to Rowlands Castle by the 11 o'clock train, Portsmouth Town. In the course of the afternoon there will be a Cricket Match and Sports. Tickets for Visitors, Railway Fare and High Tea, 3*s*. (Meat Tea). The children will assemble at the Beneficial School and the School Band will play them to the station.[103]

All in all, parents were happy. One of them put it this way

> I shall be greatly obliged if you will kindly convey to the President and Members of the Beneficial Society my sincere thanks for the benefits enjoyed by my son at and through the School of the Society and which I am glad to be able to inform you has re-

sulted in his obtaining an appointment on the Post Service as 2nd Division clerk, with a salary of £70 . . . will you also bring to the notice of Mr Gaselee my gratitude to him in giving the Scholarship and also his generosity in continuing to pay for the boy's schooling afterwards.[104]

The headmaster's relations with the inspectors were happy. One embarrassing moment only is recorded. The inspector came unannounced on 11 April 1900 only to find that the headmaster had given the boys the afternoon off to see the arrival of HMS *Powerful*. However, he was glad to note that playground space would at last be provided by levelling an area adjacent to the school.

Ernest Hill's span as headmaster ended in the harsh war years. In the early days of the school, during the Seven Years War, the feeling for the fighting men abroad provoked a response from the school and the Society: 'agreed by the Majority of Members present to take from stock £27 for the benefit of soldiers in Germany'.[105] In the 1914–18 war the response was similar. The *Portsmouth Evening News* wrote

> many of the Old Boys are serving their country in the War, as also two members of the teaching staff. Both departments have sent help of various kinds to hospitals for wounded soldiers, teachers and children taking a close interest in the work.[106]

When Ernest Hill died in 1917 the boys, in their surplices, sang at the funeral. It was a sad war-time parting.

The sports enthusiast who had supported Ernest Hill so efficiently now became headmaster. The Revd C. H, Hamilton, Chairman of the School Managers, explained that

> Mr A. J. Mills, the Assistant Master, had been appointed to the vacant Head Mastership of the Boys' Department on condition that he lived in the District of Portsea and consented to form an Evening Commerical and Dockyard Examination Class.[107]

The safe return of a number of Old Boys from the war fronts was marked by a rallying around the School. Thoughts turned to the dead and a Roll of Honour was to be placed in the school; an Old Boys Club was formed in 1923, and a number of money raising activities followed. A letter from the Secretary of the Boys Association, as it was then called, expressed their readiness to organise 'a Whist Drive in aid of School funds, undertaking to see the Mayor to obtain the use of the Banquet Room at the Town Hall for the purpose . . . and to provide Buns for the Scholars on Good Friday'.[108] Memories of Buns had not died. In fact the custom of providing buns still persists in the present Beneficial First School in Southampton Row.

School life was normal, though very hard in the post First World War period. Children were poorly dressed, often without shoes. Tedium was relieved by the occasional visit to places of interest, to the Water Works, to the Gas Works, and the occasional outing. Emulation was encouraged, in the shape of a 'Silver Watch for the best boy of the year in the school' awarded by E. H. Privett. The shortages and distress caused by the General Strike of 1926 were suffered stoically. Meanwhile the first rumblings of concern over the future of the Beneficial Society and of its School began to be heard.

The concept of a mutual aid society with monthly contributions in return for sick benefits changed with the emergence of insurance societies and a social service. The Beneficial Society found itself out of date, and dissolved itself in 1933.[109] The school became the responsibility of the Local Education Authority and continued on till 1939 when the Second World War forced the evacuation of the children to safer areas. But within a year they returned, and in September 1940 the school became a junior school, serving the area till 1962 when it was transferred to a site nearby. The new school erected there has kept the original name, and indeed can claim continuity, while the old buildings were used for Youth Training.

'. . . the fitting out of the school team . . . joining the schools' Football League . . . £2.2.0 be given' (1910–11)
Courtesy of the Portsmouth City Record Office

The final benevolent act of the Beneficial Society towards the school it had cared for for 178 years was to arrange for £200 to be invested to endow annual prizes.

Conclusion

It is fitting to end with the list of all the Headmasters of the Beneficial School. The earlier ones would not have dignified themselves with such a title; they were simply schoolmasters or teachers, rather than administrators. But all were highly regarded, for they were seen to be men who cared for the welfare of the underprivileged. They were

Charless Bettesworth	1755–1757
William Cox	1757–1796
Joseph Scullard	1797–1813
John Stephens	1813–1822
Charles Gladstair	1822–1826
William White	1826–1829
Thomas Slade	1829–1852
James Salisbury	1852–1862
James Slade	1862–1877
Charles Hunt	1877–1892
Joseph Theakstone	1892–1897
Ernest Hill	1897–1917
Archibald Mills	1917–1939

The school itself, starting from small beginnings, at a time when philanthropists felt urged to provide schooling for 'the deserving poor', served Portsea until the Second World War forced it to close. It was the focal point of the area, not only for boys of school age, but for adults who enjoyed the facilities of the Hall and grounds for their meetings, concerts and a variety of functions. But this could be said of many schools. What is significant about the Beneficial School is that it is probably unique.

Before the Board Schools of 1870, it was the Church, under its various denominations, which was the natural sponsor of elementary schools. In England there were no religious orders, like the De La Salle Order in France to provide schools for the poor. But in Portsea we have the unusual phenomenon of a school founded, not by a Church, but by an unlikely Mutual Aid Society, out of Christian compassion, using their surplus funds, and money accumulated from the fines and forfeits imposed on its members for breach of their rules, to educate boys from poor families. This is what makes it unique.

It should be borne in mind that the central thrust of basic education for the non-paying poor during the late 17th and 18th centuries came through the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. The Commissioners of Inquiry into Charities, reporting from 1818 to 1843 list a total of 1,865 non-classical schools in writing, arithmetic and religion, generally endowed or privately run, and 1,751 Subscription schools, that is, similar schools supported by subscriptions from parishioners. The SPCK was set up to coordinate and support this growing movement, and concern for the education of poor children became the favourite form of 18th Century benevolence. But in the Portsmouth area there is no trace of any SPCK charity school; this is confirmed by their archivist

> Our records show clearly that there were no 18th Century Charity Schools in Portsmouth associated with the SPCK, nor, according to the list published in the Brougham Commission's Digest of Schools and Charities for Education, 1842, were there any of the endowed category within its terms of reference either. The Beneficial School must have been of another breed.[110]

Indeed it was.

NOTE
The present "Beneficial First School" in Southampton Row is, historically, a direct descendant of the Beneficial Society's Infants' School. Headmistresses Miss C. Powell and Mrs M. Bottomley and Miss M. Tillman acting Headmistress, have all, in their own gentle way, supported by a dedicated staff, maintained the caring spirit of the older foundation.

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Laurence V. Gatt, born in Southsea, educated at St John's College and now known there as Brother Charles, has spent a lifetime in Education. He was Headmaster of St Peter's School, Bournemouth; Senior Lecturer in Mathematics at De La Salle College of Education, Manchester; Principal of St Michael's Teacher Training College, Malta; member of Council of the Royal University, and Government Representative at Strasbourg on the Council of Europe Committee for Higher Education and Research. His interest in Local History stems from studies at Portsmouth Polytechnic in this subject.

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